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Farm Broadcasters Letter



Letter No. 2201

February 21, 1985

CHINA'S BIG TURNAROUND

China's agricultural output grew by 49 pct. between 1978 and 1984, according to U.S. Department of Agriculture economists Keith Searce and Herb Moses. The startling success of China's move away from collective farming has turned it from a U.S. customer into a competitor. China's grain imports have fallen more than a third since 1982/83, and its corn exports will exceed 2 million tons this year. China was the world's leading cotton importer 5 years ago, but now it is exporting over 1 million bales annually. (Searce's and Moses' telephone number is 202-447-7383.)

AG EXPORTS WERE UP IN 1984

U.S. agricultural export values rose 5 pct. in 1984 to \$37.8 billion, and, according to a U.S. Department of Agriculture report, the first increase since 1981. Higher prices for corn, cotton, vegetable oil and cattle hides teamed with increased quantities of wheat, sorghum and cotton to generate the increase. However, fewer soybeans and less amounts of soybean meal and feeds and fodders, offset the gains in the dollar amounts.

PROSPECTIVE PLANTINGS REPORT ISSUED

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Crop Reporting Board issued its annual Prospective Plantings Report in mid-February. Here are highlights of that report:

CORN--Growers intent to plant 82 million acres this year, up 2 pct. from last year and 36 pct. above the PIK-reduced 1983 acreage.

SOYBEAN--Prospective plantings, at 64.4 million acres, are down 5 pct. from 1984, 1 pct. above 1983.

SORGHUM--17.9 million acres intended for all purposes, up 4 pct. from a year ago and up 51 pct. from the PIK-reduced acreage of 1983.

BARLEY--Acreage in 1985 is expected to total 12.4 million acres, up 4 pct. from 1984, up 19 pct. from 1983.

OATS--Producers intent to plant 12.9 million acres this year, up 5 pct. from last year but down 36 pct. from 1983.

ALL COTTON--Prospective plantings total 11 million acres, down 2 pct. from 1984 but up 38 pct. from 1983.

DURUM WHEAT--Acreage is expected to total 3.53 million acres, up 8 pct. from last year.

OTHER SPRING WHEAT--Intentions total 13.5 million acres, up 8 pct.

ALL RICE--Intended acreage for 1985 is 2.47 million acres, down 12 pct. from 1984 but 13 pct. above 1983.

NATIONAL AG DAY

National Agriculture Day will be held March 20, and Sec'y of Agriculture John Block will be the honorary chairman. He has served in this capacity since 1981. In accepting the chairmanship, Block said, "Observance of National Agricultural Day gives all of us a chance to increase public awareness about agriculture, and to emphasize to our nonfarm neighbors the impact agriculture has on our daily lives."

FEWER WORKERS, HIGHER WAGES

The latest U.S. Department of Agriculture "Farm Labor" report shows that during the week of January 6, a total of 669,000 people were working on farms and ranches in the seven states surveyed. This is down 9.7 pct. from October. The wage rate for all hired farm workers ranged from \$4.70 per hour in the Mountain Region composed of Arizona and New Mexico to \$7.44 per hour in Hawaii. Farm wage rates in Florida, the Southern Plains (includes Oklahoma and Texas) and California showed a normal seasonal increase from October, while the Mountain Region declined. The wage rate in Hawaii increased 2 cents/hour. (For more statistical information, call 202-447-5446.)

DEMAND IMPROVING BUT SUPPLIES PERSIST

Demand for farm products will grow at above-average rates again in 1985, according to U.S. Department of Agriculture economists Keith Searce and Herb Moses. Actual demand is expected to increase $1\frac{1}{2}$ to 2 pct., but even this won't be enough to remove burdensome supplies of major crops. Much of the increased demand will come because of increased restaurant spending and because of the demand for more processed products. As for the export outlook, Searce and Moses say the continued strong dollar likely will keep U.S. goods costly in foreign markets. Consequently, agricultural export volume is expected to increase only slightly, despite foreign economic growth and much larger Soviet grain imports. (Searce's and Moses' telephone number is 202-447-7383.)

SOVIETS BUY MORE CORN... LESS WHEAT

The Soviets are closing in on the 50 million tons of grain they are expected to purchase during the current marketing year. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, a recent flurry of grain purchases, principally from the U.S., has pushed total Soviet grain commitments from all origins to 19 million tons. And indications are that the Soviets have purchased significantly larger quantities of barley than earlier expected. Considering all factors, USDA analysts now say the Soviets could buy as much as 24 million tons of coarse grain this marketing year. However, with wheat, it now looks like the Soviets will end up buying less than originally expected. The current USDA estimate of how much wheat the Soviets will buy from all sources has been reduced by one million tons to 25 million tons.

FEWER SOVIET COWS AND HOGS

The Soviet newspaper Isvestiya reported on January 15 the inventories of livestock, and according to that report, both cow and hog numbers were lower than a year earlier. This is the first decline in cow numbers in at least 15 years, and according to U.S. Department of Agriculture analysts, it may reflect a shift in priority from maintaining a slow growth in inventories to efforts to increase milk yields per animal. The Isvestiya inventory also revealed that hog numbers had declined the sharpest since the distress slaughtering that occurred in the second half of 1975.

MORE POTATOES IN STORAGE

Potato lovers can be happy with the latest U.S. Department of Agriculture Potato Stocks report. It shows that potato stocks in the 15 major potato storage states are up 3 pct. from last year. If you want that in figures, it's 142 million hundredweight or 6.49 million metric tons. Russet potatoes dominate the varieties in storage, accounting for 75 pct. of the total. Whites are second at 22 pct. and reds the remaining 3 pct. (For more statistical information, call 202-447-4285.)

FROM OUR
TELEVISION
SERVICE

"1984 Wheat Export Quality"...Dr. Kenneth Gilles, administrator with USDA's Federal Grain Inspection Service, talks about the quality of U.S. wheat exports following a recent wheat quality study. Jim Johnson interviews. (321)

"Soviet Grain Situation"...USDA senior analyst Frank Gomme discusses the current Soviet grain situation and offers a look ahead at winter grains. Jim Johnson interviews. (322)

"Foreign Agricultural Trade"...USDA economist Tom Warden takes a look at factors contributing to the increase in the value of U.S. agricultural exports as well as imports in 1984. Vic Powell interviews. (323)

"Tunisian Dairy Industry"...Dale Good with USDA's Foreign Agricultural Service talks about a unique program underway in North Africa to increase agricultural development through a Tunisian dairy industry project. Vic Powell interviews. (324)

"Hydroponic Lettuce"...Jerry D'Amore focuses on the success of the hydroponic greenhouse system in Decatur, Illinois in growing lettuce. Gary Beaumont interviews. (325)

NEW FIRE
MANAGEMENT
POLICY

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Forest Service has a new policy for managing fires in wilderness areas. Forest Service Chief Max Peterson said the new policy is intended to help return fire to its natural role in the 32-million acres of Congressionally-designated wilderness administered by the Forest Service. Furthermore, he said, the new policy will reduce the possibility that dangerous fires will begin in wilderness and then spread beyond wilderness boundaries. The policy also will permit trained Forest Service officers to ignite prescribed fires in wildernesses to eliminate accumulated brush and dead trees.

TOBACCO
SITUATION
IMPROVES

A rise in unmanufactured tobacco exports and a decline in imports helped improve the U.S. tobacco trade balance in 1984 by a healthy 13 pct., according to a U.S. Department of Agriculture report. Exports of unmanufactured tobacco and tobacco product exports expanded 2 pct. to \$2.7 billion, while imports of leaf and products for consumption in this country dropped 22 pct. to \$636 million. (For more information, call 202-382-9493.)

MILK
PRODUCTION
DROPS

Milk production during January was down slightly from a year ago, 1 pct. to be exact, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Total milk production during this past January was 11.2 billion pounds. Production per cow that month averaged 1038 pounds, 6 pounds more than a year earlier. And there was 2 pct. fewer cows in the nation's dairy herd. The total million cows averaged 10.8 million head in January. (For more statistical information, call 202-447-6351.)

SOVIET
LIVESTOCK
SUFFER FROM
COLD

The cold weather that struck much of Europe and into the Soviet Union will likely have a detrimental impact on the Soviet livestock industry. The Soviet press has carried articles recently noting power outages and the lack of water supplies as the result of the weather. U.S. Department of Agriculture analysts are saying it's possible that some winter grain areas seeded for harvest as grain may be cut for green feed if feed supplies are short this spring.

OFF MIKE

Up front, an apology. In this column recently, we mentioned that Rod Hiser is the new Farm Director at KMMJ, Grand Island, NE, and that he was new to broadcasting. Wrong! According to his boss Randel Boesen, Rod has "...ten years experience in communications. He has been employed by KMMJ for several months."...New newsletter hit my desk this week. This time from KGNC, Amarillo, TX. Radonna Long edits the letter and talks about the travels, adventures, etc. of herself and co-workers John Burrow and Karr Ingham. We receive several newsletters now and would like to get more. So if you put one out, add us to your mailing list...Nice note from Ken Anderson who use to be with the National 4-H Council and is now retired in Sun City, AZ. He reads this newsletter from time to time, and so was prompted to send us a news clipping about the retirement of Bob Halvorson. He was a Maricopa County Extension Agent when he retired Jan. 1. And in his career, he spent a lot of time on radio and TV telling people about agriculture...29 years of time, in fact. As Ken said, Bob's many listeners will miss him...Jerry Reed (WIBX/NE Ag Net, Utica, NY) was honored recently with a "Broadcaster of the Year" award from the New York State Agricultural Society. Our congratulations!...We talked with George Stephens (WDAF, Kansas City, MO) a couple weeks back, and he said he'd received an interesting surprise. He was helping set up a tour to England, Germany, France, Switzerland and Holland for April and was skeptical about getting enough interest stirred up. Then the surprise. Almost immediately he'd filled one bus of 44 people and was starting on a second. Nice surprise, I'd say.

FROM OUR RADIO
SERVICE

AGRICULTURE USA #1447...(Weekly 13½ min documentary) Brenda Curtis talks to Department of Agriculture tax specialist Colein Heferan about some important information in preparing this year's tax return as well as some helpful hints towards preparing your 1985 tax return.

AGRITAPE/FARM PROGRAM REPORT #1436...(Weekly reel of news features)USDA news highlights; Block announces 1985 Farm Bill; Crop insurance as collateral for farm loans; The farmer as computer; Soybean plantings.

CONSUMER TIME #930...(Weekly 2½-3 min features) Changes in the tax law; Alimony and child support and tax laws; How to find a good tax preparer; Getting ready for '85; Crock pot cooking.

USDA RADIO NEWS SERVICE...Thurs, Feb. 28, Weekly crop and weather and agricultural prices reports; Fri, Mar. 1, Peanut stocks and processing reports; Tues, Mar. 5, Weekly weather and crop outlook; Fri, Mar. 8, Vegetable report. Dial the USDA National News Lines 202/488-8358 or 8359. All material changed at 5 p.m. EST each working day.


JAMES L. JOHNSON, Chief
Radio and Television Division